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Private Groups Report Surge in Aid to Contras

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WASHINGTON—In a conservative backlash against Congress' rejection of U.S. aid for Nicaraguan rebels, private campaigns to fund the *contras* appear to be gaining momentum—with tacit encouragement from the Reagan Administration.

Organizations raising money for the rebels against Nicaragua's leftist regime say that contributions have jumped noticeably since the Democratic-controlled House turned down President Reagan's request for \$14 million in aid two weeks ago.

And a newspaper affiliated with the Unification Church of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon announced Tuesday that it has formed a new group, led by former Treasury Secretary William E. Simon and former U.N. Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, to raise \$14 million to undo what Simon called "Congress' cowardly act."

Nonstop Phone Calls

"The telephone has been ringing almost nonstop for a week," said Bosco Matamoros, Washington representative of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the largest *contra* group. "The mail has been full of checks. People want to do something for us. After what Congress did, they feel betrayed and deceived."

"We have seen an increased response ever since Congress voted," said retired Maj. Gen. John K. Singlaub, chairman of the conservative World Anti-Communist League and a major private fund-raiser for the *contras*. "The American people believe Congress made a mistake to come down on the side of the Sandinistas." Officially, Reagan Administration spokesmen say they neither encourage nor discourage private contributions to the *contras*. White House spokesman Larry Speakes, traveling with President Reagan in

Spain, said Tuesday that the Administration has "nothing to do" with private fund-raising efforts.

Still, senior officials, speaking on condition that they not be identified, said they are delighted that Reagan's campaign for public aid to the *contras* last month, and the congressional rejection, have helped to stimulate private contributions.

"Obviously, we are pleased to see private donors come into the breach which Congress left," one official said. "We may end up winning both ways on this thing, if Congress reverses itself and provides some aid, as well as the increased level of private contributions."

The fund-raising organizations all said that they are providing only non-lethal supplies to the *contras*. Aid used for weapons or ammunition might violate the Neutrality Act, which prohibits promoting war against a country with which the United States is officially at peace.

At the same time, some acknowledged that a major purpose of their efforts is to provide non-military supplies so the *contras* can raise money for weapons outside the United States.

"We get them weapons and ammunition, but only from our chapters overseas," said Singlaub, whose World Anti-Communist League has members representing 98 countries.

Previous Contributions Small

The *contras* have solicited private funding since they began fighting the Sandinistas in 1981. Until last year, though, contributions were small; the rebels depended almost entirely on the CIA for major supplies and financial support.

Last spring, Democrats in Congress began blocking the Reagan Administration's requests for further government funding and, after several lean months, the *contras* were forced to find sources of support elsewhere.

At first, *contra* officials have said, they relied on help from other friendly countries, including the pro-American governments of El Salvador and Honduras. Gradually, though, they built a network that tapped into conservative organizations and donors in the United States and elsewhere.

"We have raised in the neighborhood of \$10 million in the last nine months," Matamoros said. "That is certainly not sufficient. But it has enabled us to survive and to continue fighting."

Nicaraguan Democratic Force chairman Adolfo Calero has said that he needs \$50 million a year to sustain his guerrillas and to absorb new recruits. The force says it has 15,000 men, plus 4,000 recruits who still need training and equipment.

Matamoros, Singlaub and others involved in the fund-raising efforts all declined to provide any specific figures for their receipts or to identify their major donors. However, they said that Congress' rejection of Reagan's request, followed by Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's visit to Moscow in search of Soviet aid, had sparked a wave of new contributions and inquiries.

It also inspired the editor of the Washington Times, Arnaud de Borchgrave, to launch a new organization to try to replace the money Congress turned down. De Borchgrave persuaded the president of the Washington Times' parent company, Moon aide Col. Bo Hi Pak, to contribute \$100,000 in start-up money.

The newspaper announced the new "Nicaraguan Freedom Fund" in a front-page editorial Monday. By Tuesday, De Borchgrave had assembled a board of directors including Simon, Kirkpatrick and conservative scholars Midge Decter and Michael Novak, and said contributions were already coming in to the newspaper's offices.

"The American people do not want to see another Cuba in this hemisphere," De Borchgrave said in an interview. "This is a vital issue."

De Borchgrave and Simon said the new group will be run independently of both the Washington Times and the Unification Church, and will send humanitarian aid to the *contras* and their families.

"Those people are seeking freedom. They are in the process of being destroyed. They are oppressed. They deserve our help," said Simon, who served in the Cabinets of Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford.

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"I believe very strongly that Congress behaved in a very cowardly fashion. Whatever happened to the Monroe Doctrine that I learned about as a kid?"

Simon said the new fund would provide supplies directly to the Nicaraguan Democratic Force and acknowledged that it was born of both political and humanitarian concerns. "We support the freedom fighters' struggle," he said.

"If we are able even to provide support to the refugees, this takes pressure off the fighting men," Singlaub said. "Many (of the refugees) are families of the freedom fighters. It is a morale factor. So I'm encouraging all humanitarian efforts."

He said his organization also has provided small boats, outboard motors and boots from the United States, as well as money for weapons and ammunition from overseas

donors.

The Sandinista government, not surprisingly, opposes the new efforts to aid the contras.

"We believe it is unlawful for private individuals in this country to finance military acts against Nicaragua," said Paul Reichler, a Washington lawyer who advises the Managua regime on legal issues. "It is a criminal law violation of the Neutrality Act . . . and in terms of sending money or supplies

for logistical purposes, these people are plainly subject to the possibility of civil lawsuits from the victims, which include the government of Nicaragua, individuals and companies which sustain damage."

Reichler, however, said that the Reagan Administration is unlikely to invoke the Neutrality Act and conceded that a civil suit could be difficult to win.

"It depends on the nature of the aid," he said. "And you could run into some problems . . . proving that Jeane Kirkpatrick's contribution caused a specific piece of damage."